

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

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NAIROBI FOR PERM REP TO UNEP

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SENV, KE

SUBJECT: SAHEL DROUGHT

1. FOLLOWING AP REPORT FROM PARIS MAY BE OF INTEREST TO
DELEGATION:

BEGIN REPORT. "EXTRAORDINARILY LOW RAINFALL IN NATIONS
NEAR THE SAHARA DESERT IN WEST AFRICA IS BEGINNING TO
CREATE CONDITIONS REMINISCENT OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE
GREAT SAHEL DROUGHT OF 1973 AND 1974.

WESTERN EXPERTS MET TODAY IN DAKAR, SENEGAL, TO ASSESS THE
REGIONAL SITUATION.

ARTHUR FELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTER-
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT MISSION IN DAKAR, SAID THE NEXT TWO
OR THREE WEEKS WILL BE CRITICAL IN DETERMINING WHETHER
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THERE WILL BE ENOUGH RAINFALL TO BLOCK A GRIM CYCLE OF
CROP FAILURES, FOOD SHORTAGES AND HUMAN MISERY.

"THE LEVELS ARE EXTRAORDINARILY LOW AT THIS POINT", HE
SAID IN A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW THURSDAY. "A WEEK AGO THINGS
SEEMED CATASTROPHIC TO SOME PEOPLE. THERE HAS BEEN SOME
RAIN IN THE INTERVENING TIME, BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH NOW TO

HAVE A CLEAR JUDGMENT."

THE SAHEL COUNTRIES ARE SENEGAL, MAURITANIA, MALI, UPPER VOLTA, NIGER, CHAD AND GAMBIA. ALL EXCEPT GAMBIA ARE FORMER FRENCH COLONIES.

THE THREAT OF A DROUGHT IN THE SAHEL FOLLOWS REPORTS THAT A FAMINE OF CRISIS PROPORTIONS HAS HIT VILLAGES IN NORTHERN GHANA, ALSO IN WEST AFRICA, BECAUSE OF DROUGHT AND "GROSS IRREGULARITIES" AMONG LOCAL OFFICIALS IN HANDLING FOOD SENT IN BY THE UNITED STATES AND WEST EUROPE. RECENT REPORT FROM THE OXFORD COMMITTEE FOR FAMINE RELIEF (OXFAM), A BRITISH CHARITY, SAID GROWING NUMBERS OF VILLAGES ARE DYING OF MALNUTRITION IN GHANA.

ONE OF THE SAHEL COUNTRIES, GAMBIA, HAS DECLARED ITSELF DROUGHT-STRICKEN AND HAS APPEALED TO THE UNITED NATIONS FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO) FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE.

THE GOVERNMENT REPORTED THAT TOTAL AVERAGE RAINFALL THIS YEAR WAS JUST FOUR INCHES, ONLY A FIFTH OF THE 1976 TOTAL, AND THAT 60 PERCENT OF THE EARLY NILET AND MAIDE CROPS HAS ALREADY BEEN LOST." END REPORT. CHRISTOPHER

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